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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VILNIUS'S LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO INFLUX OF
TOURISTS: WHAT IT MEANS FOR AMCITS

1. This is the first cable in a two-part series detailing efforts law enforcement in Lithuania's capital of Vilnius are taking to meet the increased demand upon its services by a burgeoning tourist industry, and a review of Vilnius's local criminal justice facilities.

2. Summary. More tourists -- and more Amcits -- visit Lithuania's capital city of Vilnius every year, and the local law enforcement agencies are doing what they can to cope. Utilizing EU funds, they plan several customer service improvements that should benefit Amcit visitors, including provision of English-language training to officers, increasing to nearly 100 the number of surveillance cameras in the most heavily trafficked areas of Vilnius, and reducing response times on assistance calls. During site visits to two of Vilnius's largest central district police headquarters, senior administrators, told Consular staff that they still face shortfalls in staff, equipment, and financing that can affect the quality and celerity of service to visitors. End Summary.

3. Three members of Post's consular staff, including a Vice Consul, Senior ACS FSN, and Fraud Assistant on January 17 toured two district police headquarters responsible for the most heavily trafficked parts of Vilnius, including the area around the U.S. Embassy and Vilnius's airport, and bus and train stations. Staff met with Petras Burdelis and Liucija Boruseviciene, commanders of Vilnius' second and third commissariats, or district police headquarters, respectively. Discussions with interlocutors were open and frank, and consular staff were offered complete access to all facilities.

Vilnius Increasingly Popular for American Tourists

4. Lithuania has increasingly become a popular destination for travelers from the United States. GOL statistics indicate that travel by Americans to Lithuania increased 30 percent between 2002-2004, from 27,800 to 36,200 visitors per year, respectively. While most visitors will only interact with law enforcement personnel at Vilnius' airport, or notice a foot patrol in Old Town Vilnius, a few may run afoul of the law and become guests of Lithuania's police and penitentiary system. For incidents involving acts at the simple misdemeanor level, most Americans will face "administrative" discipline that likely would entail a short stay in police lockup and a fine levied at the police station. Administrative offenses include illegal employment, possessing an open container of alcohol, purchasing or possessing very small amounts of narcotics for personal use, breaching public order, theft of property valued at less than \$50, DUI, minor traffic offenses, using public transportation without a ticket, and discharging a firearm. Those involved in more serious incidents, where Lithuanian authorities would seek to press formal charges, may remain guests of the police station for up to 48 hours before being transferred to Lukiskes prison.

GOL Addressing Growth in Tourism...

5. The GOL recently adopted several initiatives to improve the quality and responsiveness with which law enforcement agencies provide services and assistance to tourists. While assistance for Russian or Polish speakers is usually available at every police station, the Ministry of Interior, using EU seed money, is sending select police officers from Vilnius for rudimentary English language training over a six-month period. Though the first cadre of 100 officers began this program in January 2006, the goal is for district headquarters and smaller police stations in Vilnius to have English-language assistance available to tourists without the need to call the central police headquarters or rely upon contract interpreters. Officers attend class once or twice a week in lieu of their regular duties for two hours of instruction. The GOL installed 78 video cameras throughout Old Town Vilnius, with another 20 slated to come on line before spring.

Police interlocutors also note that there are efforts underway to reduce police response time to telephone requests for assistance as well as the time it takes for the city SWAT team to come online.

...Yet Problems Abound

16. Police interlocutors, however, note that they face significant shortfalls in basic manpower and equipment. Commander Boruseviciene, whose district covers the bulk of Old Town Vilnius, the airport and bus and train stations, told us that she has only 170 officers and seven vehicles with which to provide services to the more than 9,000,000 people per annum that transit her district. She also noted that there were also only six computers to serve her district headquarters, so officers often must utilize their own personal computers for work. A significant contributor to the dearth of personnel, she said, is that the post-tax starting salary for a police officer is approximately \$240 per month, roughly half the average Lithuanian salary. The GOL's delivery of promised salary increases and funding for equipment and police station renovations often fall short of what is needed.

Comment

17. With tourism on the rise in Lithuania, there is a good chance that we will see more foreigners -- including American citizens -- interact with the Lithuanian penal system. Though it will be a struggle for the Vilnius police to meet the challenge of increased tourist traffic on their meager resources, they have taken some necessary, commonsense steps to meeting the challenge.